

CHAPTER IX

THE CRUSADE

THE history of the Poor Law in England is divided into two well-marked epochs, so far as the nineteenth and the twentieth century are concerned, both of which are famous for the Royal Commissions. The Webbs have written the story of both, in terms that are likely to be definitive, in the last two volumes of their Local Government series. The second volume opens with the following paragraphs

"The Poor Law Enquiry Commission of 1832-1834 arose out of the intolerable scandals of the then existing state of things, and its revolutionary proposals were the outcome of a whole generation of abstract reasoning upon the misdeeds of local administrators. The active members of the Commission and then staff of investigators all belonged to the then dominant school of thought, and the evidence was collected and arranged so as to bring into overwhelming prominence certain prejudged conclusions. The Report was immediately accepted by enlightened opinion, and, within a few months of publication its recommendations were substantially embodied in an Act of Parliament.

"The Royal Commission on the Poor Law and the Unemployed, which the Conservative Government appointed in December 1905, was in every one of these features the exact antithesis to its famous predecessor. It was not the outcome of any widespread or long-continued agitation against the existing system of Poor Relief. There

